How to Write Really Good Research Funding Applications

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ABSTRACT

Academic researchers, including those early in their careers, are under intense pressure to write research funding applications and obtain external research funding. Yet relatively little guidance helps them navigate the funding application process. We provide insights into the funding writing process, with a special focus on resources available to business-to-business marketing researchers. The practical advice pertains to developing a funding strategy, navigating the funding review process, and providing information that reviewers seek when evaluating funding applications, among others. We also highlight the role of university leaders, who must effectively support and reward their faculty's activity of applying for funding, as well as the benefits of university-based research support offices. To conclude, we detail two recent successful examples of business-to-business marketing funding applications.

Keywords: early career researchers; leadership; research funding applications; research funding; research support.

INTRODUCTION

Industrial Marketing Management aims to promote the best research, with relevant implications for academics and practitioners—a goal that similarly has gained widespread attention in recent years (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Carton & Mouricou, 2017; Kieser, Nicolai, & Seidl, 2015; Toffel, 2016), such that both governments and research funding bodies (e.g., strategic research counsels) offer funding only for research that has relevance to consumers, practitioners, or policy makers. Universities increasingly demand that their faculty obtain research funding (Blume-Kohout, Kumar, & Sood, 2015). Attracting such research funding can be significant for academics, in terms of developing impactful research, enhancing their career prospects, and closing the research–relevance gap (Bloch, Graverson, & Pedersen, 2014; Gerritsen, Pug, & van der Wiel, 2013). Along with this increasing pressure on faculty to seek external research funding, many countries have cut their funding of higher education, sometimes dramatically (Tandberg, 2010), drastically limiting the amount of funding available.

The combination of these trends increases competition and rejection rates for research funding, with potentially detrimental effects on funding efforts and research funding income for the future. Considering the current climate surrounding business schools, or universities in general, external research funding will remain an important priority and qualification for most researchers. In this crucial, competitive, challenging setting, very little guidance exists to help researchers develop effective research funding applications, however. Although some broad literature suggests general guidelines, we also note the lack of insights into research funding efforts related to business-to-business marketing management. With this article, we attempt to establish a comprehensive set of guidelines to assist researchers in this field, by addressing some key topics.

First, we examine the importance of leadership (department, school, or university level) for creating a culture in which researchers regard applying for research funding as one of their primary tasks. Relatedly, we outline strategies and action plans that leaders can implement to encourage, develop, support, and reward researchers who actively pursue funding. Second, we explore the benefits of exploiting various relationships and networks to identify funding opportunities. Third, we consider research support offices, which many schools feature and which offer a range of services related to strategic and practical aspects of applying for research funding. Fourth, we scrutinize actual research funding applications to explicate both the evaluation process and the elements in an application that reviewers seek from research funding applications. Fifth, and finally, we review two successful funding applications to gain a broader perspective. Throughout the article, we reflect on typical challenges for early career researchers.

LEADERSHIP

Many business schools and universities set ambitious goals of increasing their research funding exponentially in coming years. Researchers who attract research funding should be rewarded, and leaders should offer realistic, in-kind support to contribute to the feasibility of the proposed research project and demonstrate the support of the host organization. When successful funding applications become a prerequisite for tenure or promotion (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998), early career researchers must balance the demand that they publish articles in top journals with their need to write successful research funding applications (Lindgreen, Vallaster, & Vanhamme, 2001). Thus, the start of an academic career can be a very stressful period, requiring careful considerations of ways to deal with the varying demands some of which we discuss next.

At university level, when research funding is on the agenda, senior management might be willing to send all the incoming funds to the successful departments (or applicants) or supplement that funding, insofar as charging no overhead costs. Such forms of support encourage departments and their faculty to seek funding.

At the department level, the head might organize seminars to instruct early career researchers in how to write good applications or identify relevant research foundations (Porter 2011). The seminars also could outline key questions that every application should answer, detail the funding landscape, and predict future developments. With sufficient knowledge about different research foundations and research funding elements, the head of the department can assess whether a particular researcher or research group is likely to be successful in attracting a specific research funding. Based on these insights, the head of department can encourage good combinations of research ideas, researchers, and funding agencies.

A series of research seminars also can encourage faculty members who might feel discouraged or are having trouble receiving funding. They should cover various question topics, including the following:

- How did you get the idea for your research?
- How did this idea become an actual research project on which you worked?
- Do you ever get discouraged?
- How do you motivate yourself when discouraged?
- Have you changed any scholarly habits to become even more productive?

Furthermore, research seminars allow visiting academics to meet with individual faculty members who share similar research interests and want to discuss their research in progress. These visiting academics then can expand the department's existing relationships and networks, as well as encourage new perspectives and ideas. Furthermore, visiting academics can help early career researchers take stock of their efforts and likelihood of garnering funding. Similarly, informal brown-bag seminars allow faculty members to present their projects in progress to their peers and ask for advice, comments, and suggestions.

Considering their many responsibilities, heads of department might establish a research funding committee and delegate responsibility to this committee to promote the quality and quantity of funding applications. Such committees also help lower barriers to applying for research funding, spread knowhow and information about research funding opportunities, and supplement centrally coordinated efforts by the university's research support office. In addition, formal training should be available by the research support office to suggest a structured approach to crafting a successful applications. Some schools maintain dedicated programs to support early career researchers; others provide specific suggestions for drawing up research budgets or administering research funds.

A chairperson of a research funding committee should receive credit for work hours devoted to tasks such as (see also Porter, 2011):

- Chairing departmental research funding committee and leading its meetings.
- Maintaining ongoing, direct contact with the research support office.
- Assisting the head of department in formulating a research funding strategy.
- Working toward meeting the department's research funding goals.
- Answering research funding–related queries from top management.
- Serving as the first point of contact for research funding–related issues.
- Coordinating obligatory or voluntary internal peer reviews of applications.
- Establishing strategic alliances with other research-intensive institutions.

- Organizing seminars, such as department meetings to present various aspects of fundraising, selective meetings for faculty members actively seeking research funding, or writing clubs to read and comment on one another's ideas and applications.
- Establishing subgroups that investigate research funding from industry actors.

With regard to incentives at the individual level to increase submissions of successful funding applications, the head of the department might award applicants work hours to application writing, as well as buy-out time if they receive the funding and the inclusion of research funding as a criterion for promotion. Heads of department should establish these optimal conditions. For example, to incentivize research funding efforts, heads of department might send a strong signal by giving early career researchers explicit time to work on promising research applications (judged by the quality of the research topic, rationale, and strength of the applicant). The overhead costs for successful funding applications also could be channeled back to funding holders; obtaining funding should be evaluated positively in personnel reviews. Highly ranked research publications resulting from a research project could be awarded with money deposited in the individual researcher's account, which then could be used to facilitate new funding applications.

During annual reviews, heads of departments should discuss detailed research plans with faculty members, including how they plan to develop successful research funding applications. This information should detail the likely applications to be submitted in the next one, three, and five years. Successful research funding then would be important elements to inform recruitment and promotion decisions.

Faculty members also should discuss their research plans with mentors, because research plans are intrinsically connected to funding applications. In fact, each faculty member should have an opportunity to work with a mentor (internal or external to the department), especially if they plan to apply for big research funding. The purpose of a mentoring system is not solely for mentors to work with mentees on particular research projects; rather, it is to offer a framework for discussing pertinent issues. Support from an experienced mentor, who has attracted external funding and been involved in assessing grant applications, is invaluable to early career researchers. Some supervisors also might have their own funding that allows them to support their students and projects by early career colleagues (Lindgreen, Palmer, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2002). With mentors, early career researchers should discuss a strategy for seeking realistic research funding, as well as ways to optimize the proposed research project to reflect the available foundations and instruments.

Individual faculty members might want to form their own funding application writing club, though most projects should be presented in a brown-bag seminar before being entered into the writing club. Considering the variety of research interests within any given department, more than one writing club could form. To support them, departments could invite a leading academic in the field to attend writing club meetings—an initiative that also could lead to longer term collaborations between faculty members and leading academics. Writing clubs offer several key opportunities. First, when scholars are considering whether to devote significant time and effort to a funding application, they can draw on other colleagues' previous experience to help make their determination. Second, other early career researchers can contribute to and coauthor research funding applications. Funding writing skills require training to develop, and obtaining even small funding can provide early career researchers with a sense of independence, as well as a new entry for their CVs. Third, writing club members can discuss research funding, to specify which investment strategies they might match (i.e., a project could respond to calls for different funding, interdisciplinary research, post doc and mobility research funding, excellence funding, or industrial collaboration).

Departments likely regard larger funding amounts as more important; the production and transaction costs are proportionally higher for projects with smaller funding. At research-intensive universities, departments also prioritize research projects that lead to academic publications, rather than consultancy tasks. In such settings, consultancy-based funding applications should be minimized, along with empirical analyses that do not meet the requirements for potential publication in influential academic journals. Yet to the frustration of academics, government-backed funds often focus on research activities designed to aid businesses or enterprises. Thus researchers face a dilemma: Academic journals prioritize micro-analyses that lead to new theoretical insights, but government-backed research funding supports aggregated, cross-disciplinary analyses at the macro or meso level.

The ongoing challenge is to find government-funded projects that also lead to findings that can be published in influential academic journals. For example, a disconnect often arises between research objectives and research funding opportunities, but rather than trying to build tenuous connections, researchers need to find funding opportunities that already reveal synergies with their own research agenda. Research funding applications that pertain to the researchers' area of expertise also provide them with an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: complete the application and receive funding, then potentially publish the findings of the funded research project in peer-reviewed journals. If it leverages his or her existing research expertise, the funding application also gains credibility, because reviewers take researchers' curriculum vitae (CV) into consideration in their evaluations. The quality of the CV can be as important as the promise of the research project, because it can demonstrate a match among the proposed research project, the competences of the researcher, and the goals of the funding agency.

RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS

No researchers are alone in their funding writing, though it may seem that way sometimes. Thus another option for the department is to seek strategic alliances with key research institutions to increase the quality of its research funding applications (e.g., inviting renowned scholars to join the applications), as well as the number of large-scale research projects in which the department serves as a partner (e.g., linking to other research institutions with potential synergistic effects). Even early career researchers have personal networks that they should leverage to develop their research grant applications. Partaking in cross-disciplinary strategic alliances with other institutions can be effective, because government agencies often prefer aggregated, cross-disciplinary projects. Beyond the strategic alliances, networking and faculty members' ability to produce attractive applications are key outcomes of such efforts. Networks provide access to nationally and internationally dispersed colleagues, who might have complimentary research expertise or interests, as is often required by funding agencies. For example, the Global Challenges Research Fund requires grant applications to include at least one partner organization from the DAC List of ODA Recipients (OECD, 2018), a list that identifies all countries and territories eligible to receive official development assistance.

Willing partners are available among the network of working relationships that researchers develop, and some funding agencies prioritize such research support, which in turn may reveal funding opportunities. Academic institutions also provide support for preparing applications or even internal funding for cross-disciplinary projects. An industry association could be looking to fund a certain number of research projects per year.

Many national and international research funding bodies invest in individual and collaborative funding. Collaborative funding offer opportunities to strengthen networks. In some cases, a researcher needs to take the lead on a large-scale application; in other cases, an effective strategy is to join applications led by other researchers. It is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue with close collaborators to discuss upcoming opportunities and options to participate in others' applications.

To find funding in creative ways, researchers can search publications by industry associations, which may offer funding or access to databases. Many universities have their own research institutes, such as the Institute for the Study of Business Markets (www.isbm.org), headquartered at Pennsylvania State University. In addition, business-to-business marketing management researchers should check the current list of research priorities by the Marketing Science Institute (www.msi.org). A priority research topic is more likely to produce a successful research funding application.

Researchers also should be prepared to move beyond their traditional networks or comfort zones. Many collaborative research funding call for interdisciplinary or intersector approaches, so scholars should identify researchers from other disciplines who might provide complementary competences. They could even prepare a short pitch, explaining how others might contribute and what the impact of their contribution would be. For example, a researcher working on business-to-business product innovation might want to find a colleague from the engineering school who can offer product development insights; industrial designers could be good collaborators for research projects studying the functionality, aesthetics, or ergonomics of new products.

Learning from colleagues also can be an inspiration. Early career researchers should identify colleagues who have succeeded in obtaining similar funding, because they can offer advice about how they prepared their application or review a new application. They might even share a copy of their own successful application for inspiration. Furthermore, they likely will reveal where they obtained support and resources. A funding writing specialist in the research support office will have extensive experience writing big proposals and can contribute to ensure all the paperwork is in order and deadlines are met.

The hosting university also might offer research funding or funding-in-aid, providing seed money for exploratory research or pilot tests. These application processes tend to be less daunting, and promising early results based on this funding can be beneficial for subsequent, external applications. In this effort, early career researchers still need to identify research priorities; if the dean of research introduces a new initiative to support cross-functional research, faculty members may be more likely to get funding to work with colleagues in other departments, so business-to-business researchers might study big data analytics with a management information systems scholar or distribution logistics with a transportation or supply chain management researcher.

Finally, researchers should attend conferences and seminars devoted to research topics that match the requirements of funding agencies. National and international conferences feature works in progress by relevant colleagues, which may help researchers refine their own research plans. Internally, brown-bag seminars with visiting professors are critical to attend, especially those that range beyond business-to-business marketing. A consumer behavioral researcher presenting on the wisdom of crowds or the effectiveness of social media marketing might stimulate interesting ideas for business-to-business marketing applications. The avenues for further research that appear at the end of most published articles also offer good sources of inspiration.

RESEARCH SUPPORT OFFICE

As noted, most universities have a research support office that offers services related to strategic and practical aspects of applying for research funding. Whether at a central university or department level, this office will have thorough experience with the general techniques of funding writing, as well as with specific funding instruments. Yet even with these helpful services, many researchers use the research support offices only at the last minute and for mandatory aspects, such as gaining approval of a research budget or obtaining signatures on formal documents. We recommend that early career researchers get in touch with the research support office as soon as they consider applying for a research funding, then exploit all of its available services and advice (e.g., outlining the fundraising strategy, obtaining invitations to funding writing workshops and information meetings, obtaining templates for elements of the application, contacting other research funding holders willing to share their experience). In addition, research support office personnel may be available to read and provide feedback on draft versions of applications. They likely are already in contact with key funding bodies, so they can provide pertinent advice. Starting early and involving support staff enables researchers to complete the administrative elements of the application easily, then obtain feedback about how to fine-tune the scientific and technical elements of the application.

Larger private research foundations and national funding agencies also represent sources of advice, information, and support. Researchers should not hesitate to contact research foundations; they often appreciate the dialogue and are interested in attracting as many strong applications as possible. The research foundations might agree to check the formalities of incoming applications, such as whether they meet the overall scope. However, they rarely are involved in the actual evaluation or selection of successful applications. For EU funding, researchers can obtain guidance from their national contact point, who can be identified by a search on the EU website, often functioning within national agencies tasked with encouraging research and innovation.

RESEARCH FUNDING APPLICATION

A good research funding application provides reviewers with all the relevant information in a clear and accessible manner, allowing them to become excited and assess the proposal according to the evaluation criteria established by the research foundation. The evaluation criteria might vary somewhat, but key questions usually revolve around what, why, how, who, and where queries. That is, reviewers assess:

- What, the research idea;
- Why, the extent to which the research addresses an important problem or challenge in a novel and groundbreaking manner and to whom it is important;
- How, the objectives and methods and its potential impact, in terms of how the research might change science or the world;
- Who, including the research profile and competences of the applicants; and
- Where, reflecting the research environment with respect to both access to appropriate infrastructures and the intellectual setting.

More concrete evaluation criteria likely are available on the research foundation’s website. Researchers should pay close attention to these criteria while developing their funding applications, to ensure they provide reviewers with easily accessible answers and meet all the listed criteria in a logical, clear manner. In addition, the project description must follow the exact instructions listed in the research call. We describe some generic elements of nearly all project descriptions in the following sections.

Writing a research funding application is not the same as writing a doctoral research proposal. The writing style for a funding application should differ from the traditional style required by academic writing. Porter (2007) summarizes key differences: The writing should be persuasive and personal, selling the research idea and conveying excitement in accessible language with short sentences, supported with bullet points and key phrases. A funding application should focus on demonstrating that the proposed project matches the goals set by the research foundation, as well as describing its objectives, proposed activities, and expected outcomes. This future-oriented description of the actions to be taken also should detail the important problem that the project will address. Verbosity and incomprehensible text, with unexplained abbreviations, poor grammar, or spelling errors, will have negative influences on evaluations. Furthermore, writing a doctoral research proposal usually means starting from scratch, without having conducted any research or collected any data to test the hypotheses. Some doctoral students do not even have specific hypotheses when they write their doctoral research proposals. An application for a research funding differs significantly. Most funding applications refer to projects that researchers have partly conducted or started. The findings from their preliminary studies suggest the need for additional, follow-up studies, and such needs represent the foundation for a logical application that can appeal to research funding agencies.

Yet researchers cannot get caught in “autopilot mode” when developing their funding applications. Early career researchers often acquire, mostly unconsciously, routines and practices during their doctoral training, which they continue to apply in various settings, reflecting a sort of unconscious competence (Luft & Ingham, 1955) or heuristic reasoning (Ippoliti, 2015). For example, researchers might unthinkingly apply existing routines and practices to craft research questions, design their empirical studies, or write methodology sections. Yet such routines and practices might not be standard in other domains and fields. Therefore, the ways that researchers need to write, justify, and explain their research pursuits for one funding application may be very different from what they need to do for another (Porter, 2007).

In particular, a key goal is to find a balance between using technical jargon (to convey subject matter expertise) and simplicity (to appeal to a broad audience of unknown research funding reviewers) when writing an application. That is, researchers must write well enough for everyone on the review panel to understand their applications, but also convey specific details about the proposed research project in a sufficiently technical manner.

The target readers of a research funding application are its evaluators; the researcher's aim is to prompt the best possible evaluation from these reviewers. Understanding reviewers and the evaluation process thus is critical. Typical reviewers are scientists who might not have expertise within the researcher's particular research area. They often conduct their evaluations outside regular work hours, donating their efforts and time voluntarily. In addition, they may be responsible to review dozens of applications, on a long list of predefined evaluation criteria. Thus, the best funding applications are easy to follow, convey excitement about the project, and provide all the information the reviewer might need. Some reviewers develop an impression of the quality of the application quickly; the rest of the time they devote to the review (whether 15 minutes or several hours) involves identifying relevant information that confirms (or contradicts) their initial view and completing the assessment forms.

Due to the vast number of applications a reviewer will assess, using predefined evaluation criteria (to make a good first impression), the application structure must follow the exact guidelines listed in the call for proposals. Reviewers should be able to get a sense of the project from the abstract and accompanying illustrations, so that they read more detailed parts more closely to gain insights into particular details, rather than desperately searching for the overall meaning. According to the Danish Agency of Science and Higher Education (2018), reviewers skim funding applications to obtain an overview and familiarize themselves with the proposed project. The abstract is key; it gives the reviewer an idea of the underlying idea and can convey excitement and enthusiasm. Researchers should regard the abstract of their application like a “movie trailer” that captures readers’ interest and offers a solid argument for embracing the overall research project. After having read the abstract, the reviewer should be excited about the research project, understand the main idea, and agree that, overall, it matches the research foundation’s goals. In this case, the reviewer will look forward to reading the rest of the application, anticipating that it will be exiting and a pleasure to read and evaluate.

Another useful element is the estimation of the time needed to conduct a research project, although this is not an easy task. It becomes even more difficult when we realize that reviewers with one funding agency might reject an application as insufficiently ambitious (e.g., if the project will take X years, the research should do more), even as reviewers from another funding agency reject the same application for the opposite reason (e.g., a research project that lasts the same X years could not possibly achieve all that the application proposes). This ambiguity and the ultimate review response often depends on whether the review panel is familiar with the type of research and methodology proposed. Thus, applicants must justify their workload, as well as why the time scale they propose is appropriate. They also need to adjust their predictions to the agency; funding applications funded by public institutions versus industry actors differ greatly in the expected timelines. Compared with public institutions, industry agencies often require significantly shorter time scales and expect funded research projects to be completed faster, so that the findings can be used while the topic is still relevant and timely. Industry funding sources also tend to care little about researchers' academic schedules (e.g., exam periods, heavy teaching periods), so applicants might find themselves devoting much of their time to working on their research project. Such demands require that they confirm they can fit the research project into their work agenda, perhaps with innovative solutions (e.g., moving some teaching responsibilities to another semester).

The layout of the application, including its illustrations and graphics, are useful elements. Key illustrations should explain the overall concept and methodology; the time scale could be represented in a Gantt chart, revealing the organization of the project. Guidelines for graphical abstracts are available from Elsevier (https://www.elsevier.com/authors/journal-authors/graphical-abstract) and other publishers. An ideal approach would be to prepare four or five simple, high-quality illustrations designed to present the research project to a broad audience, then incorporate these illustrations into the application with appropriate titles and legends. The illustrations should capture the essence of what the research foundation wants, such as interdisciplinary approaches or applications of knowledge to achieve societal impacts. A good graphic is easier to recall than several pages of text when evaluating applications.

Budget predictions are critical, with several effects on funding applications. To derive a research budget for a funding application, researchers must identify different categories that require funding, such as personnel, graduate student support, equipment, materials, and supplies. Then they can delve deeper into each category. For example, graduate student support budgets must include students' fringe benefits (e.g., health insurance) and tuition, in addition to their stipends. Beyond these categories, funding applications should account for indirect expenses, which typically are a percentage of research funding, charged by universities for administering them. Some funding agencies impose restrictions on which budget items they will support and the amount of indirect expenses they are prepared to pay. Thus researchers must discuss with and gain approval from their university for their budgets, prior to submitting their application.

The ultimate success of an application requires nearly unanimous approval from a sizeable group of reviewers (Porter, 2007). After having read an application, the primary and secondary reviewer need to be passionate about the research project and should be equipped with strong arguments to convey their support to the rest of the review panel and overcome any concerns. Here again, the abstract and illustrations are important assets, easily accessible to review panel members who might not have read the full application. A video entitled NIH Peer Review Revealed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBDxI6l4dOA) provides a front-row seat to an NIH peer review meeting, in which real scientists review fictional but realistic funding applications for their scientific merit. As this video shows, the reviewers discuss their evaluation criteria, including the need for them to feel exited and enthusiastic, rather than concerned or struggling with the information.

Therefore, a good funding application achieves the following outcomes (Porter, 2005): Reviewers immediately recognize the interesting, innovative ideas contained in the proposal and how those ideas will contribute to addressing the objectives put forth by the research foundation in the call for research proposals, as well as to moving the research field forward. Then the reviewers can devote their attention to the concrete aims, hypotheses, and methods, as well as their consistency (Porter, 2005). The contribution to the state of the art, the presence of some preliminary data, appropriate identifications of potential risks, and solid contingency plans all can help eliminate potential concerns and affirm that the research project will be feasible. Table 1 summarizes elements of a typical research funding application.

Table 1: Elements of research funding application

Elements	Description
Abstract	The abstract is the first thing reviewers read; in some cases, it is the only thing all reviewers read. Thus, the abstract must offer a solid argument for the proposed research and leave reviewers excited and interested in reading the rest of the application. The abstract should give a clear picture of the objectives, why the project is important, what the expected outcomes are, and how these outcomes will be accomplished.
Introduction	A short introduction can present the central problem, challenge, or question that the research proposal aims to address, thereby allowing reviewers to recognize why the research project is important and how it promises to solve a problem, challenge, or question.
Background and state of the art	The background section should provide an overview of the current state of the art and demonstrate the researcher's solid foundation and contributions to this research area. Many researchers try to pack too many details into this section, offering reviews of the entire research field. In contrast, the goal should be to provide a brief, educational summary of the background that is pertinent for the particular research project, clearly demonstrating knowledge gaps or methodological weaknesses that have limited progression and setting the scene for how the proposed research project will advance the field.
Preliminary results	The presentation of preliminary results should demonstrate the soundness of the research idea, hypotheses, and proposed approach. Researchers should avoid offering a rash of data that seem to imply that the research project is already completed.
Objectives and hypotheses	This section gives direction to the whole research proposal. It might present an overarching goal or objective, in addition to more concrete objectives. Some pitfalls to avoid include presenting only vague overall goals or confusing the objectives with the tasks and deliverables. The objectives are concrete steps toward accomplishing the goal of the research project. In some cases, this section follows right after the introduction, whereas in others, the background section is necessary to set the foundation for understanding the objectives and hypotheses.
Work plan and methodological approach	This next section contains the plan for achieving specific objectives. It should start with a description of the research strategy, reflecting insights into knowledge gaps and the preliminary results. Then it can offer provide an overview of the studies that will constitute the project. With this information, reviewers can gain an overview of the project and its elements. Furthermore, this section should refer to the Gantt diagram, which provide a graphic overview of the methodological approaches, deliverables, and milestones. Then each study or work package should be presented within dedicated subsections. These subsections might repeat specific objectives, present hypotheses, and summarize the background and rationale for each part of the study. The description of the concrete research approach then

	should contain the appropriate level of detail and, when relevant, deliverables and milestones. Each subsection should conclude with a summary of the outcome and interpretation—that is, one or two sentences to describe what will be available at the end of this stage and how it will feed into the rest of the research project. It is not appropriate to present a detailed protocol for each study; reviewers instead need to be convinced that the objectives can be achieved and understand how, so too many details can be overwhelming. Finally, a separate section should summarize the risks and contingency plans to demonstrate a complete sense of the research project, including potential difficulties and solid strategies for handling them. A short section on ethical considerations also may be relevant.
Organization and feasibility	This section supports reviewers' evaluations of the research environment, project leadership, and feasibility. In collaborative projects, it should summarize the roles, contributions, experiences, and competencies of each partner. The research budget and time scale can be cited briefly, to highlight the feasibility of the proposed project. The contributions from the host organization also might be mentioned here, to underline its commitment and the feasibility of the project. Researchers must make sure to provide clear information about who will lead any collaborative research projects.
Dissemination and communication of results	In describing plans for disseminating the findings, this section should cite specific conferences and journals, as well as options for sharing the information with stakeholders such as industrial partners, policy makers, and the general public. The details in this section should match the research foundation's emphasis and priorities.
Originality, significance, and expected impacts	Finally, the funding application needs to emphasize the novelty and originality of the proposed project, its potential to advance the field, and the expected societal impacts. This section thus offers an important link back to the introduction, describing the problem to be solved or question answered. The expected societal impacts or key performance indicators may be more prominent, depending on the focus of the research foundation. Many private research foundations (and the EU) prioritize societal impact considerations.
	Moreover, some application packages should include CVs from any co-applicants, publication lists, a letter of commitment from the host institution, collaboration agreements, and research budget information. These documents meet the guidelines established by the research foundation; they also should be revised and optimized to match the evaluation criteria. For example, researchers might expand their CVs to include a section on leadership and a summary of previous research, highlighting aspects that demonstrate they are appropriate recipients of research funding.

TWO CASES

Two cases of successful research funding offer a broader perspective on our recommendations. One case involved a consortium of researchers applying for Danish regional research funding; the other case sought funding from a leading U.K. agency.

Case 1: Danish regional research funding

As a researcher at a research intensive university, the principal investigator (located at University of Southern Denmark) has driven or actively participated in 12 successful funding applications to Danish and European funding agencies, earning funding that totals close to 4 million euro. The applications pertain to public–private innovation, design, and business model innovation. A teamwork of researchers and anywhere from three to 12 consortia partners participated in these funding applications.

Started in 2015 and scheduled to finish in 2019, the research project received a total of 7.4 million euro; the partnering university (i.e., University of Southern Denmark) received 1.2 million euro of the total. The purpose of the research project is to strengthen the growth and innovation capacity of regional small and medium-sized companies by developing increased use and competencies for design, including design thinking, strategic design, and design-driven innovation. Furthermore, the research project aims to increase innovation cooperation between companies and knowledge institutions, as well as the total number of innovative companies in the region (i.e., southern Denmark). The research project consists of nine subprojects; the University of Southern Denmark leads three of them ("Reframe the Future," "Value Chain Innovation," and "Accumulation of Knowledge and Reporting across the Work Packages").

The research project was not broken down into subprojects initially, and there was not sufficient discussion of the collaboration among consortium partners or the integration and interactions of the different subprojects. This gap resulted in several challenges, which required revisions to the funding application. Forming the consortium and writing the funding application was a long and political process. As the partners sought to agree on core ideas and align their roles, other research projects spun out.

The process began in 2014, when the Region of Southern Denmark announced plans to bring together and support design activities and actors in the region. The initial consortium consisted of three public incubators, four municipalities, four educational institutions, and the design-cluster office. In numerous meetings among the consortium partners and leading administrative and politicians from various municipalities, the purpose was to align the partners around a common vision and understanding of the core idea and concept of the funding application, as well as determining the roles of the different partners and the administration of the project. This stage ended with the realization that the interests of the initial consortium partners were too diverse for a collective agreement. Therefore, three municipalities, three incubators, and University of Southern Denmark's entrepreneurship institution left the consortium (but continued in a separate collaboration, which earned funding for another research project focused on entrepreneurship and growth among design and creative companies).

The reduced consortium, consisting of two educational institutions (Design School Kolding and University of Southern Denmark), the publicly funded design cluster Design2innovate (located in southern Denmark), the Capital of Children (an innovation unit formed by Billund municipality and the LEGO foundation), and Kolding municipality continued and completed the funding application. With a reduced consortium, the work progressed faster. The research application eventually included nine subprojects. To support cooperation, the consortium had to agree on a common vision and understanding, as well as establish trust among the partners and recognition of one another's skills. The consortium partners realized that understanding other partners' motivations and competencies would help them develop a research project that matched their own goals.

To write the funding application, the first step was to understand the strategy and plans of the Region of Southern Denmark's fund. The consortium partners studied the regional fund's strategy and previously funded projects. Next, the consortium partners discussed the overall purpose of their proposed research project, then shaped their arguments according to various steps of research project. The administrative managers from the partnering institutions reached agreement. The planning and description of some subprojects started immediately after the consortium partners had agreed on the overall research purpose, which further improved understanding and agreement among the partners. Some subprojects emerged later in the process; the partners entered into dialogues with the regional fund to understand how it perceived the relevance of these subprojects. This feedback helped ensure that the funding application and subprojects matched the regional fund's scope.

When writing the application for three subprojects led by the University of Southern Denmark, the consortium partners pondered research questions they wanted to publish in academic journals, yet the application never explicitly mentioned these research questions. Rather, it describes the problem that companies in the region seek to address. Consortium partners had to look for evidence that this problem also was of academic interest, using academic sources and a report from the Danish Industry Association. These sources together convinced the regional fund that the research questions were both legitimate and relevant.

The chairperson of the board of the design-cluster office facilitated two meetings with groups of companies potentially interested in participating in the research project, designed to understand the companies' needs and get their commitment to participate. Part of the process planning the different subprojects also involved finding ways to integrate them, even though different partnering institutions would conduct the subprojects.

The outcome was that the regional fund selected all subprojects for funding. Of interest is that the regional fund initially rejected one public–private innovation subproject involving Kolding municipality, arguing that this project was too distant from design, and that the regional fund already supported this type of research in other programs. The rejection led to the formation of a new subproject among the three municipalities and public–private innovation researchers from the University of Southern Denmark. The municipalities identified essential challenges in their welfare services that they had not been able to solve and sought a consortium of companies to address. The regional fund eventually chose to fund this research project.

The research consortium also discussed the integration of subprojects and the involvement of the partnering institutions. This part of the research project remains challenging. The consortium plans to seek collaboration with companies at a much earlier stage for its future funding applications, which is particularly feasible because it has established close working relationships with many companies.

Perhaps the most interesting learning outcome of working with a regional fund is the access it provides to exceptional empirical data. The researchers collaborate closely with both public institutions and private companies. In addition, to ensure the academic quality of the research, it may be necessary to apply for research funding from other places.

Case 2: Funding from a leading U.K. funding agency

This research project involves colleagues from two universities (Birkbeck College University of London and University of Kent), dedicated to examining the relational and absorptive capabilities of service sector companies for co-creating radical or incremental innovations with supply chain partners. The research project is funded by the British Academy of Management's competitive research funding. With a multiple case study approach, the research project seeks to make important contributions to both extant literature and key stakeholders, reflecting both the service sector's important role in local economic development and the lack of sufficient knowledge about how companies operating in service sectors co-create innovations in service supply chains.

Some similarities and differences arise from a comparison of this research project with the Danish regional fund–supported project. In a similar sense, this research project featured clear planning, designed to identify potential problems and challenges to service sector companies, particularly after the Brexit vote. The principal and co-investigators started discussing initial ideas, seeking to understand network- and company-level capabilities and their role in innovation. The initial idea was developed and reviewed at the department level, followed by a solicitation of feedback from the director of research. The final proposal was then developed in accordance with the requirements and guidance of the British Academy of Management. Unlike the Danish project though, the investigators did not develop any subprojects but instead focused on understanding the role of relational and internal capabilities in a wider supply chain context. As such, the investigators did not work in a consortium setting, though they identified relevant companies from two different regions that could be interviewed as part of the research project.

The investigators also identified a clear research question and linked it to the methodology. The research project description featured sound justifications, as well as information about the sampling strategy and potential respondents. Finally, the investigators spent much time fine-tuning the impact and dissemination strategies.

The research project was evaluated on the following criteria:

- Content: quality of potential contribution to the field.
- Potential significance for theory and or practice.
- Originality: methodology/research design/knowledge of the field.
- Relevance for British Academy of Management Grant Scheme 2017–2018.
- Quality of application: organization, structure, and clarity.

The investigators' experience with developing this application, as well as working on and reviewing several other funding applications, leads the investigors to offer the following suggestions and strategies for securing research funding:

- Understand the funding bodies' requirements and align the proposal with those requirements.
- Recognize the importance of project planning and addressing a research problem.
- Align the research questions with the proposed methodology.
- Keep the target audience and potential reviewers in mind; get peer feedback and adjust the proposal by integrating experienced colleagues' suggestions and removing any mistakes.
- Identify the potential impact and dissemination strategies for a range of stakeholders, both academic and non-academic.

CONCLUSIONS

Academic researchers face increased pressure to write funding applications and obtain external funding. University administrators see successful research funding applications as a source of funding, an opportunity to gain recognition, and a means to boost their rankings. Scholars who write successful research funding proposals, then produce research that is relevant to managers and policy makers, can help close the research–relevance gap. However, as research funding continues to be cut, and rejection rates for funding proposals rise, the ever-increasing pressure on academics demands that they write better funding applications. With this article, we seek to help them do so, focusing on the context of business-to-business marketing academic research and the particular challenges for early career researchers.

Specifically, we provide practical advice for developing funding strategies. This article also highlights that leadership at every level within the university is critical for establishing a culture that places a high priority on funding writing. Various strategies and plans can help university leaders and heads of department support and reward funding writing activity by faculty members. Furthermore, no academic researchers should feel alone in their quest to write proposals and obtain funding; they can rely on relationships and networks to identify and pursue fundable research opportunities. In turn, we offer some practical guidance for preparing the actual application. The funding review process may seem mysterious to especially early career researchers, so we attempt to remove some of the mystery by exploring attributes that most funding reviewers seek. In turn, and leveraging our own experiences with seeking funding, we provide details about each element of a successful funding application. We conclude by outlining two recent, successful business-to-business marketing research funding applications, which can serve as starting points for future proposals.

Considering the complexity and difficulty of writing grant applications, a successful application might seem like an end goal, but really, receiving a research grant is only the beginning. The research project needs to be completed successfully, so researchers should immediately seek out their research support office to ensure the transfer of funds between the agency and the university. Most universities have well-established processes to facilitate this transfer. The researcher, as the principal investigator, is responsible for all activities related to the grant, including budgets, personnel management, data collection, periodic progress updates, and submissions of findings to the funding agency. In many cases, continuing to receive funding may be contingent on meeting intermediate objectives in a timely manner.

Research funding writing is a daunting task, and the chances of obtaining funding often are slim. Yet the pressure to produce persists. Luckily, there are many resources available, including university-led research institutes or research support offices whose employees have expert knowledge about application processes and experience managing all the details of an application. Researchers also might apply for seed money from their university or a government agency. It may not be enough to fund years of research, but such initial funding can get the research off the ground and permit scholars to conduct some exploratory work, develop and pretest surveys, or initiate the first stage of a multi-phase research initiative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The article is part in a series of the co-editors-in-chiefs' reflections on important aspects of planning, undertaking, and publishing research in business-to-business marketing management, reflections that should help prospective researchers eventually to see their findings published in Industrial Marketing Management and other top journals (LaPlaca, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2018, 2019; Lindgreen & Di Benedetto, 2018). Sometimes, these articles are co-written with other authors so as to get the broadest perspective on a given topic to the benefit of prospective authors. Together, the authors for this article have received research funding from diverse funding bodies. Furthermore, they have reviewed numerous funding applications. Parts of this article draw on research funding strategies the authors have drawn up for their departments. As such, this article did not undergo a regular review process.

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